



It is held that witches are organized into covens on local, national, and international levels. In the covens are kings, queens, messengers and executioners. At night, when witches sleep, it is believed that their souls fly out of their physical bodies to meetings.

In my previous presentations—“What is Witchcraft?” and “Witchcraft: Physical or Spiritual?”—I attempted to describe what the Akan people in Ghana thought of witchcraft. In this presentation, I want us to consider the organization of witches and their activities, like those mentioned above and many others.

The Meeting & Activity of Witches

Formerly, the Akan believed that witches met on big trees. It was also believed that the covens' pots, which were thought to contain human blood, were usually kept under the trees on which they met. However, it is currently believed that the meeting places of witches include the sea, rivers, lakes, market places, and church buildings. In all these, it is believed that the ordinary person cannot see the organisation of witches with the naked eyes.

It is believed that witches feed on flesh and blood of human beings, which they take turns in providing. From the perspective of the Akan, the witch can mainly provide a relative. Consequently, witches are thought to kill some of their relatives during special occasions such as Christmas, Easter, and the Akan festivals for their celebrations. This, it is thought, accounts for the many deaths during these occasions.

It is alleged that witches fly overseas to attack some of their relatives abroad. There are stories of people in foreign countries who turned on their television sets only to see strange sights of their mothers, aunts, grandmothers or other relatives resident in Ghana, believed to be witches.

It is strongly believed that witches cause infertility in women, impotence in men, still birth and serial infant mortality in families, called *awomawu*. However, medical

science has proven that the frequent infant mortality in some families is due to sickle cell anemia.

Witches are thought to cause many other diseases such as diabetes, leprosy and convulsions. They are believed to inflict material losses on people also. It is believed that unemployment or joblessness is one of the results of witchcraft attacks.

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Witches can prevent people from getting jobs or can cause employees to lose their jobs. It is believed also that they send their witch-spirit animals (*ahomoa*) to steal people's money, thus rendering their victims poor or bankrupt. Witches are thought to promote the breeding of parasites on cash crops like cocoa trees, thus rendering the trees less fruitful.

Furthermore, witches are believed to influence people to do deeds that cause them to be ignoble. For instance, it is said that they can make honourable leaders, such as chiefs, rich men, heads of states, family heads, and pastors commit undesirable acts such as adultery, rape, drunkenness and theft so as to make them lose respect in the community and possibly lose their positions. Moreover, it is held that witches can read people's intentions and work against them. They frustrate the good plans of people by opposing their progress through spiritual manipulations.

The belief that the witch can provide mainly a relative to be killed causes lots of problems. For example, if a family member dies during such occasions as described above, or suffers from one of the illnesses described, someone in the family may be accused of using witchcraft to kill or cause the afflictions. Often, it is a vulnerable person who has no one to protect him or her that becomes the victim of such accusations. This vulnerable person can be a poor adult, old lady, domestic assistant or house help. Often, wretched mentally ill old women are victims of such accusations. The rich, powerful, successful, well-endowed, or influential person is rarely accused of witchcraft. This means the perceived witchcraft activities breed a lot of tension, suspicion and enmity among family members and is also used as an instrument of oppression.

The belief that witches can fly overseas to inflict suffering and material loss on relatives also causes people to attribute all their failures abroad to 'evil relatives' at home in Ghana. Thus, instead of finding scientific and practical explanations to their failures so they can effectively solve their problems, these failures blame so-called witches in their extended families.

Things Imperceptible

The Akan concept of witch (*bayie*) must not be confused with other supernatural ways of causing evil and harm. The work of traditional priests, enchanter and sorcerers (*akomfo*, *asumankwafo* and *adutofo*) involve ritual acts and visible apparatus, such as the use of 'fetishes', 'amulets' and 'medicines' (*asuman*, *nkabre* and *aduro*). The distinctive characteristic of harming by witchcraft (*bayie*), as described above, is that it is done in secret; it is the imperceptible projection of inducement from the witch to the target victim.

Essentially, it is believed that witchcraft is evil, but it is said that witches can turn all the destructive acts mentioned above into good deeds for those they love. The difference between good and evil witchcraft (*bayie*) is said to depend upon the nature of the possessor and not the witchcraft (*bayie*) itself. Evil witchcraft (*bayikwasea* or *bayiboro*), it is held, grows through the possessor's insatiable appetite for 'human flesh or blood' and power, instead of using his or her power to help people.

The implications of these suppositions are many. Witchcraft is considered a spiritual, complex and secret society that cannot be monitored or evaluated by

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scientific methods. Witchcraft has made many people live in fear and evil

suspicions. Most deaths of infants are attributed to witchcraft attacks as well as deaths of adults who die mysteriously. Many chronic diseases are thought to be due to the work of witches.

Some hold witches responsible for acts of mismanagement or carelessness. All sorts of bad behavioural practices are attributed to the schemes of witches. The relatives of good witches prosper, supposedly due to the benevolent spiritual operations of the good witches in their families. It is thought that the relatives of evil witches suffer poverty, diseases, failures, disgrace, and all sorts of afflictions as the result of the diabolical spiritual operations of the bad witches in their families. These concepts cause confusion and

suspicion among family members, since no one knows the witch within.

Consequently, whenever there is a mishap, failure or disease there is a call for consultation with powerful spirit-persons for supernatural knowledge of the causes of the problems. This assumption leaves room for dubious people to deceive the populace and cause confusion in society.

For instance, when a prognosis includes naming a family member, which it often does, it creates conflicts in the family. Indeed, witchcraft issues usually become the source of family tension, which sometimes draw family members into litigations before their family head or chiefs.

Anticipations

On the contrary, while I am not discussing witches and the Bible now, in the New Testament, those who were demon possessed were not portrayed as people having advantage over others. Rather, as seen in Jesus encounters with those who were possessed with demons, they were presented as people being tormented and hurt by the inhabiting demons. They were presented as sufferers who needed the help of those who were not demon possessed. Knowing the difference between the biblical presentation of the spirit world and the African world view helps to live under the power of God. This may engage our attention in future presentations.

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The Chancellor of Pentecost University College and the Chairman of the Church of Pentecost. He holds PhD from the University of Birmingham, UK.

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